

this old heart of mine (is weak for you) by palisadespalisades

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Summary:

"You know the moment he knows he's hurting you, he'll end it, because he's kind and your friend and he'd never want to hurt you. You don't tell him how much it hurts because, despite it all, you don't want it to end. You don't want to lose this — facsimile of something real, something that feels like it means something, even when it doesn't. You don't want to lose his bruised lips smiling against your collarbone, you don't want to lose the silkiness of his hair twisted into your fingers, you don't want to lose his laugh, clear like a bell, when you make a particularly dry quip. You don't want to lose him, and if he knew how your heart ached every time he looked at you — and why it ached so badly, you'd lose him for good."

Lucas is in love with Will. Will is in love with someone else. Everybody hurts.

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Author's Note:

a little exploration of lucas in second character. i've kind of fallen in love w this ship and i want to start writing it seriously, and i needed to figure out what i wanted lucas's head to look like, so this is what happened!

let me know what you think @ homokaspbrak on tumblr, and please don't uhhh kill me

[here's a playlist i made, also.](#)

You know the moment he knows he's hurting you, he'll end it, because he's kind and your friends and he'd *never* want to hurt you. You don't tell him how much it hurts because, despite it all, you don't want it to end. You don't want to lose this — facsimile of something real, something that feels like it means something, even when it doesn't. You don't want to lose his bruised lips smiling against your collarbone, you don't want to lose the silkiness of his hair twisted into your fingers, you don't want to lose his laugh, clear like a bell, when you make a particularly dry quip. You don't want to lose him, and if he knew how your heart ached every time he looked at you — and why it ached so badly, you'd lose him for good.

It really was a coincidence, that you were the two to end up together — in Chicago, that is. He's studying drawing and painting at SAIC, because of course he is, creating worlds with a pencil and some crayons for as long as you can remember — “Good thing,” you joke, hands drumming on your steering wheel, “because breathing nothing but paint fumes for the past four years couldn't have helped your SAT scores.” He snorts, and your stomach falls to your feet. You drive out to Chicago together, ‘Leaving Hawkins’ signed blocked by the boxes you can barely cram into your car. Before you go, Joyce pulls you into a hug so tight you can barely breathe, and says “*Take care of my boy.*” She says it with such gravity that you can't help but agree (as though there's any world where you wouldn't — you've been trying to take care of her boy for the past five years, to varying degrees of

success.) You say: “Of course, Mrs. Byers, I’ll always look out for Will.” She replies: “Oh, sweetie. Call me Joyce.” And with that, she sends you off, with her blessing to steal her boy away to the big city. It all feels very — you’re not sure how to describe it, but it kind of feels like when Mike and Jane set off for California, and Hopper had a death grip on Mike’s arm and a soft look in his eye. You try not to think of it like that, though.

You try not to think about things like that at all, if you can manage it, because it never does you any good. After all, you’re a scientist, a pragmatist, a realist, and a skeptic. You don’t chase fairy-tales or trip into make-believe, because you know you’ll end up disappointed, and these parallels you’re seeing: they’re exactly that. Because it’s not like that, and it never will be.

You are a scientist, and you like to think of things factually, so here are the facts: you love Will Byers. You’ve loved Will Byers since you were thirteen years old, and he didn’t show up in class one morning, and you realized that you were ready to die before you’d lose him — and you were ready to die for just a *shot* at getting him back. It took you a long time to understand exactly how you felt about Will Byers, because you loved Max, too, and that was what love was supposed to be, right? A handsome boy and a pretty girl at a school dance, a quick peck on the lips when you’re young, turning into frenching and tongue and hands under shirts, feet kicking under tables and shaky skateboard lessons. It wasn’t a boy and one of his best friends, charcoal sketches tucked away carefully, like precious secrets, lingering glances and burning coal in the pits of your stomach and an unending desire to brush the hair from his eyes and keep him safe forever. But you and Max broke up in senior year, and it was so *easy* to move on — to start bumping elbows and sitting next to Will, to help him with his physics homework and pretend your cheeks weren’t on fire each time he asked to sketch you, steadying your voice for every fake-begrudging yes. It was then, when you figured it out — sitting across from him, pencil in his hand, sitting perfectly still, that you wanted to lean in and kiss him.

You wouldn’t kiss Will until your first year of college, a semester in, at some party you dragged him too. You insisted it was time for you two to branch out; that you were spending too much time together,

attached at the hip — because moving to a big city from a such a small town was scary, because you knew each other and you were best friends and that could be enough, because things in the Party were different, and other people might not understand, because Joyce made you *swear* you'd take care of him, and you'd be damned if you broke that promise. You dragged him to the party so you could both try and branch out, and spent the whole night talking in a corner instead, drinking too many drinks, way too fast, and leaning in closer and closer and closer until — the next morning, you woke up in bed together, with bruised lips and sex hair and clothes discarded on the floor.

You panicked. He didn't. He suggested: "We make this... a thing. It was fun. We're attracted to each other. We're really good friends. I think... we could make this a *thing*. An experiment, you know?" in that slow, careful way Will got sometimes, when he wasn't *quite* sure, swaying slightly. You knew you had to say no. You knew the way you looked at him and he looked at you was different — you knew that this would bring you nothing but misery — you knew that this was the wrong decision, based on every theoretical calculation running through your head, but even great scientists make terrible mistakes, and yours was looking at him, because then, you couldn't say no. Your hand grazed his and you pulled him back to bed, and that was the beginning of the end.

You knew it was a bad idea when you agreed to it, but this is what you didn't expect: for all of his confidence, Will has no idea how this is supposed to work.

He holds your hand when you watch movies, and crawls onto your lap during the boring parts, long, artist fingers scraping at your scalp in a way that makes your spine tingle. He snickers into your mouth when the credits started rolling, because "Ghostbusters is terrible make-out music," and you pin him down across the length of the couch, because there, he can't hear the thumping of your heart, loud like a drum beat and a complete betrayal. He drags you to art galleries and your fingers brush when you walk a little too close, which you always do. You get coffee after — you: small, drip, cream, no sugar; him: latte, which you'd never heard of before you came to Chicago, and you find too sweet and milky, but he likes well enough

— and he orders for you, and gets you a pastry, too, when your workload at school's a little too stifling and you can't breathe under all the formulas. You bring him greasy diner dinners in his dorm when you know he's too deep into a painting to remember to eat, and when you hand it off to him he pulls you down, presses a soft kiss onto your jaw, and waves you goodbye as you leave, dazed each time. It feels like you're dating, a pair of young lovebirds. It feels like love. It feels so close to love that it hurts so bitterly, because you know it isn't.

You are a scientist, and you like to think of things factually, so here are the facts: you love Will. Will does not love you. Will loves someone else.

You've always known that Will loves Mike — that he looks at Mike like he hangs the stars. You've seen the drawings, that started as crayon on lined paper from notebooks and grew to oil on canvasses wider than your arm-span, and they're beautiful. It's a softness that's never touched his sketches of you. You've always known that Will loves Mike, and it's always hurt, but never as much as it did, one drizzly night in March, when Will's in your arms and your beat-up old record player is crooning and you're pressing kisses against his collarbone when he whispers — "Mike." You pretend not to hear. You pretend your eyes don't cloud. You pretend it doesn't wound you. Your teeth graze down his ribs and you don't talk to him for a week, because you can't even think of him without your voice starting to waver.

You weren't raised to think that love made men weak — and you weren't raised on the idea that softness, that romance and heartbreak, were weak ideas. You were raised on records of men crooning about the sweethearts that broke them and the ones that saved them, too. So you don't know where these ideas came from — these ideas that somehow, you're wrong for hurting when he looks at you and wants someone else, like it's some slight on your character. But you feel weak. Pathetic, for wanting someone who doesn't want you like you wish they would. And you swallow it, but it wears you down.

You have to tell someone, so you tell Max. You write letters to her every week, and she writes you back, telling you about how school is going and all the girls she's dating — all the pretty, curly-haired girls

with serious, brown eyes. You call her an idiot for breaking her own heart, and you know she's laughing when she writes you back, calling you a dumbass because you're doing the same. When she visits, you hug in the train terminal and fuck in your bedroom, tearful and slow; she sleeps in your bed after, and for once, you don't care that the person besides you wishes they were somewhere else, because for once, you do too. You don't know if she makes you feel more lonely or less — but if it's more, at least you're lonely together.

You think Will doesn't like it when you fuck Max. You know he has no right not to.

You are miserable in his arms and worse without them, a spiral of loneliness that you can't drag yourself out of. You think it would be best, maybe, if you tried to get out there — meet someone else, but when a pretty girl with close-cropped hair and a grunge lean in your physics class asks you on a date, you politely decline. She asks "Oh, you have a girlfriend?" You hesitate. "A boyfriend?" she asks, eyebrow raised. You paused even longer before saying no. She gave you this look of intense pity that makes you feel sick to your stomach, like you're so obvious it's bleeding all over — you are pathetic, the unrequited lover, and everyone knows it.

You pull it back, you look at the situation factually, because you are a scientist and you like facts: you are in love with Will Byers. You are in love with the freckles on his lips, and the way he traces the freckles on your back into constellations, and how, even after losing the bowlcut, he still lets his hair sweep his eyes, and the softness of his smile, and the kindness of his words, and the beauty in his art.

Will Byers loves you too; you know this. He loves your bravery and how steadfast you are; how you never let up, and how you know when you're wrong, and you do everything in your power to make it right. He loves the little sighs you make when he scrapes down the back of your neck. He loves your boring coffee order, and how he can always turn to you, because regardless of what's going on with you, you'll be there.

But you're in love with him, and he just loves you. Not *just* — you're grateful for the way Will can love you, really. But it's not the way you want him to.

Those are just the facts.

When you go home for Easter, you tell yourself you aren't going to talk about it. You told your parents everything growing up — out of all of your friends, your home life is probably the best, the most normal, stable, loving. It was always open, and you could always talk to them — about the mundane things, anyways. But this, somehow, feels not-mundane. You steel yourself as you get in the car, you do *not* think about the boy drumming his hands on the dashboard to Queen, and you think to yourself: these are not the mundane, boyhood problems you took to your parents in your youth. This is not mundane and painfully so all at once, but more than anything, this is pathetic.

And when your mother smiles at you across the table and ask if you've met anyone *nice*, you feel your resolve crumble. Max is a good confidante, but she is not your parents, and doesn't know how to comfort you when you feel small, and helpless, and weak. And when Erica goes to bed and your father hands you a beer with a finger zipping his lips and a wink, you ask him a question you know he can't answer: "What do you do when you're in love with someone who's in love with someone else?" His face falls, in the way it does when parents realize they can't protect their kids from everything, least of all heartbreak. When your mother wraps her arms around you, pulling you into a deep hug, and you smell her perfume and hear crooning from the record player you grow up with about someone's sad, solitary heart — that's when you fall to pieces. Your shoulders shake, and your eyes well with tears, and when you whisper, voice cracking, "Why doesn't he love me back, mom?" neither of them blink. She rubs your shoulders, hushing you with that soothing voice and holds you together while you shudder out barely-suppressed sobs, and your father gets you another beer, eyes glassy. When he hands it to you, and you take it but don't drink, he says: "When someone loves you back, and someone *will*, Lucas, they'll be the luckiest person in the goddamn world."

This isn't working. It took you far too long to come to that conclusion, considering the empirical data; that's what you realize when you're driving back to Chicago with Will in the passenger seat, arm making waves out the window as you drive. This isn't working.

This is breaking your heart and you deserve not to hurt.

It takes you a month to end it. A month of slow unravelling, separating your life from Will's, like pulling bristles from your jeans after running through a field. It was a hell of a time while it lasted, but now you see all these things you never realized you'd have to deal with, and your fingers are bleeding as you tear them away. You stop lending him clothes — the offers of sweaters and sweatpants and jeans that only fit when the cuffs are rolled stop. You don't cuddle after sex anymore — you rarely stay in bed, or on the couch, or wherever it is. When he showers at your place, you're at your desk by the time he's out, "I have to study," on your lips like some pathetic, transparent excuse. That doe-eyed look of hurt and confusion kills you every time, but you know it's a necessary pain. It's a detached kind of detangling, an emotional shutdown you hardly knew you were capable of.

When you finally tell him, it feels too much like a breakup for you to feel remotely alright. You stop yourself from spilling tears, sliding on your sweater in his cramped dorm. There's a sketch of you in the corner across a canvas, smiling eyes that look foreign to you when you think of your face in the mirror, serious and tired. "I don't think we should do this anymore," you say, feeling sudden and shaky, your back to him.

"Oh, why?" he asks, voice tinged in confusion.

You know what you don't say. You don't even let yourself think it, fearing the words slipping out without permission, but you know. Instead, you say: "I'm into this girl in my physics class, and I don't think she'd be cool with me sleeping with my best friend." Your voice is cold, even.

"Okay," he replies, quiet, but you don't hear him. You've already left.

You ask out the girl from your physics class, and she gives you a skeptical look. "Got your situation sorted?" she asks, playing with her ring. You answer in the positive, your affirmation surer than you are by a long-shot. You go on a date, and you think it goes spectacularly well: she's smart, and funny, and just as much of a dork as you are. But when the date ends, and you walk her back to her dorm, she

kisses you on the cheek and tells you that she doesn't think your situation is sorted in the least, but you should call her when you *actually* get it figured out. You're left standing outside her building at ten at night, wondering what went wrong, and when you call Max on the phone that night, your voice shakes when you ask her how the hell you're supposed to fix this.

"If I knew, I'd tell you," she says, and you sigh, because you know it's true.

It's weeks before Will calls you again. You're knee-deep in finals, halfway to a breakdown, and you don't need the stress, really, but you don't know how to say no to him. Once was the best you could do. You meet up with him at the coffee shop near the gallery you used to go to — he orders the drinks before you get there. A latte for him, and a small drip for you, cream, no sugar. It's supposed to be neutral territory, but it isn't, and you feel distinctly nauseous when you see him. You sip your coffee quietly, not ready to speak, hands clasped around the mug.

"Why did we stop? Was there really a girl? I thought... it was going well." You blanch.

"It was supposed to be a casual thing, wasn't it?" you respond, not quite meeting his question or his eye. You don't know how to do either.

"It never really was, though?" and his lips are quirking into a nervous smile, and you can't — you can't do this, you can't deal with it.

That's when you're done. That's why you stand up, finishing the coffee in one long sip and say: "I'm a little too in love with you, Will Byers, to pretend I'm okay with being a substitute for Mike," You put the mug down on the table softly, and mumble "so thanks for the coffee, I'll be seeing you," before you turn and leave.

You really think you've gotten away with it, a clean break, when a hand grips your shoulders and you feel it, bony artist-fingers, through your jacket.

"Lucas, that's not *fair*. You can't just say that to me and leave. What's

wrong with you?”

You turn to him, and you still can't meet his eye. “Do you love me?”

“Of course I do, Lucas, you're my best friend. I really care about you.”

Your eyes narrow, in a way that is absolutely unfair to both of you. “Let me rephrase: are you in love with me?” He doesn't answer. The silence feels deafening. “Okay, another question,” you start, and feel a lot meaner than you thought you could be. This isn't fair to Will, and it's not fair to you, but your lips move before your mind does and maybe this is what it'll take to get it through your head that this won't work, anyways. “Are you in love with Mike?”

His eyes are glassy, and you can't bear to look at him. “That's really not fair, Lucas.”

This time, he lets you walk away.

You are a scientist, and these are the facts: this was a failed experiment. You let your feelings cloud your judgement. You are a pragmatist, and a realist, and a skeptic, and a smart man, and you were none of these things. These are the facts: you loved Will Byers, and you hurt him. Will Byers loved you, and you broke his heart.

And in the end, both of you hurt.

Author's Note:

again, find me at homokaspbrak on tumblr and let me know what you think !!